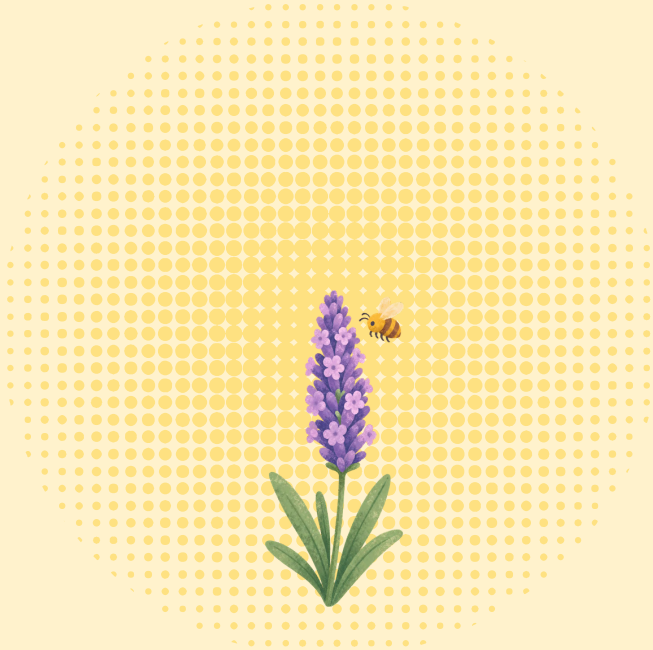


SOLVING
THE WASTE CRISIS
IN THE INDIAN HIMALAYAS
Q2 Report FY 2026-27



“Every one of us can make a contribution. And quite often we are looking for the big things and forget that, wherever we are, we can make a contribution.”

— Wangari Maathai

FOREWORD

> धीरे -धीरे रे मना, धीरे सब कुछ होय।
> माली सींचे सौ घड़ा, ऋतु आए फल होय॥
>
> ***Slowly, O mind, everything happens in its own time.***
> ***The gardener may pour a hundred pots of water, but fruit comes only in its season.***

Sant Kabir wrote these lines centuries ago, and they still hold true in our lives, at work and at home. Change works the same way. We build systems to serve the Himalaya, but how quickly they bear fruit is not in our hands. What we can control is the effort we bring each day.

In a country of ~1.5 billion people, waste has long been an afterthought. Asking households to segregate waste at source or villages to stop burning it means changing habits built over generations. Such shifts happen slowly, through repeated conversations and trust earned over time. We can ask communities for patience only if we practise it ourselves. I feel this most in fundraising, where conversations with funders take months, sometimes years. The funding landscape continues to evolve, reminding us of the importance of resilience, adaptability and long-term partnerships in sustaining the work we do. Kabir reminds me to keep watering with care and trust.

This patience is reflected in communities changing their habits, our teams on the ground, partners walking alongside us, and funders backing systems that take years to bear fruit. Thank you for tending this garden with us.

The stories in this report capture change, nurtured with patience, beginning to bear fruit.



Suraj Agarwal
Associate Director,
Waste Warriors Society



Our Paryavaran Sakhis in Corbett now coordinate waste transportation in their villages, taking responsibility for collection schedules, logistics and ensuring waste reaches the designated processing facility.

WASTE WARRIORS

REDUCE RE-USE RECYCLE

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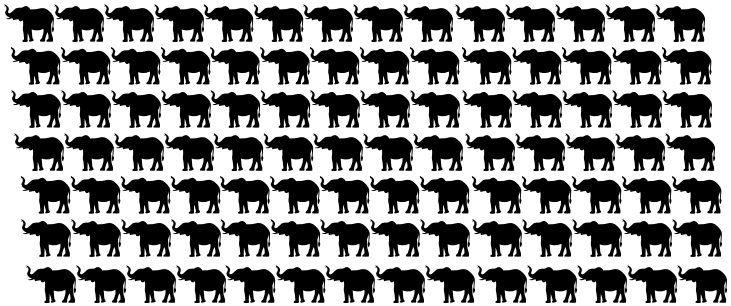
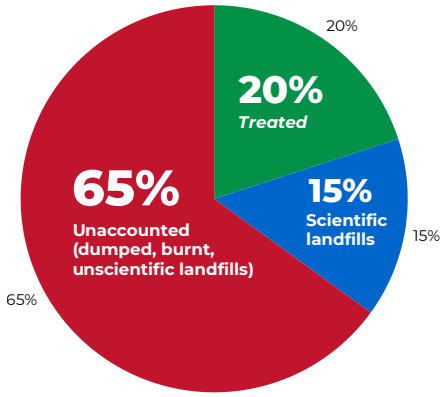
THE PROBLEM

The IHR produces over **1.9 million tonnes*** of waste per year. Imagine that's the size of **9,00,000 Asian elephants.**



*CPCB Annual Report

WHERE DOES THE WASTE GO?*

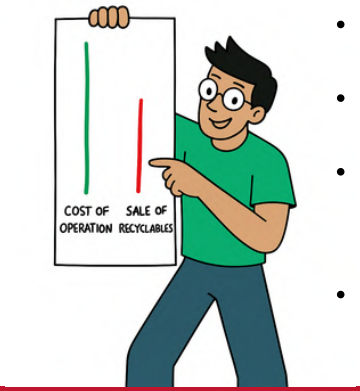




- *Microplastics in soil, waterways, wildlife zones*
- *20% global methane emissions from unmanaged wet waste*
- *GHG and black carbon from open burning of waste*

*Independent studies

THE COST OF RESPONSIBLE WASTE MANAGEMENT...



- **60-70%** of waste collected is **reject or low value.**
- Low sale of recyclables and **high cost of operations.**
- **Challenging terrain** for collection/transportation and **low land availability** for storage.
- **Insufficient government funds** for holistic waste management

IMPACT ON MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES...





*Open dumps and waste burning trigger **respiratory and gut infections.***



*Plastic-clogged drains and streams contribute to **severe flash floods.***



IHR warming 1.5x faster than global average leading to ***irreversible glacial melt.***

Over 2 billion people depend on the Himalayas for water, food, and life itself. Every piece of waste dumped or burnt in the Himalayas affects the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Climate Cost of Poor Waste Management

Last year, we processed ~2500 tonnes of waste. That saved the equivalent of **~3800 tonnes of CO_2*** from being emitted into the atmosphere. That is about as much emissions as **800 cars in a year**. We don't usually think of waste as warming the Earth, except for when it is burnt. But even your benign vegetable peels rotting in dumps emit methane, which has approximately 80 times the global warming potential of CO_2 over a 20-year period, making it a particularly potent driver of near-term climate change.

Why waste matters for climate action

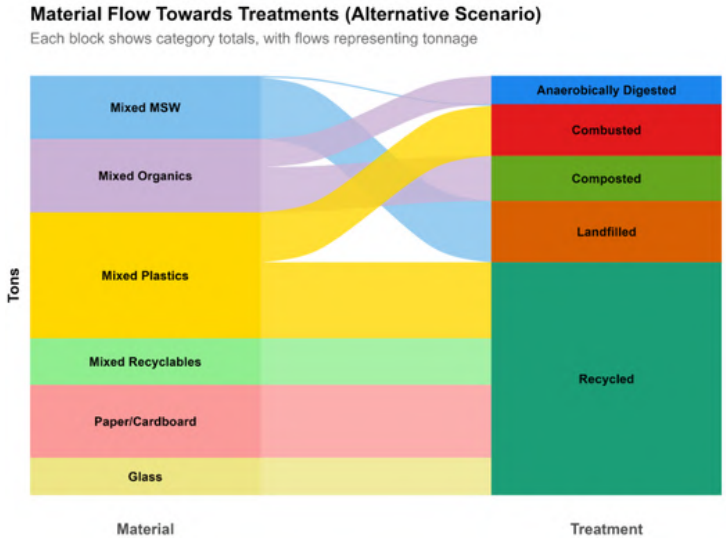
- **3–5%** of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the waste sector.
- **20%** of global methane emissions are attributed to the waste sector.
- **15–20%** of global emissions could be reduced through circular economy approaches, including recycling metals, paper and plastics.

Why the Himalayas are particularly vulnerable

- **Open burning rates** in Himachal Pradesh **(44%)** and Uttarakhand **(32%)** are among the highest in India.
- Waste burning releases black carbon, which can settle on snow and glaciers, reducing their reflectivity and accelerating snow and ice melt.

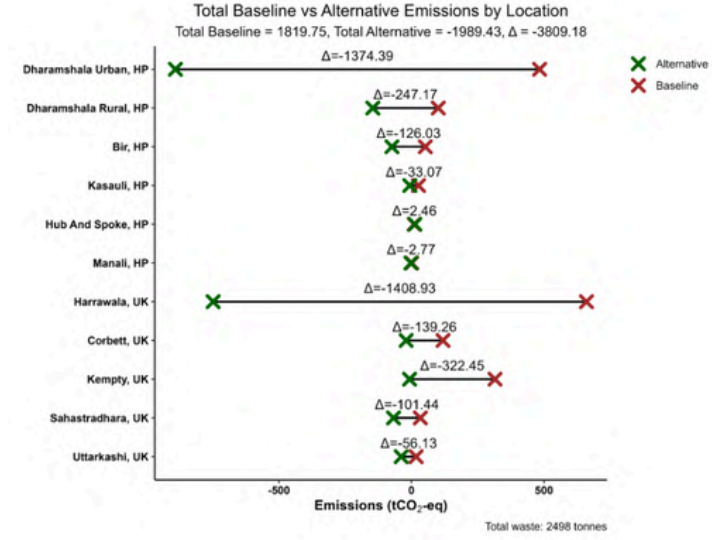
The Insight

Poorly managed waste contributes to climate change, while responsible waste management can help mitigate it. Even unburnt waste, such as organic matter decomposing in dumpsites, releases greenhouse gases that warm the earth. Recycling dry waste offers an added climate benefit by reducing the need for energy-intensive production of virgin materials.



20% of global methane emissions are attributed to the waste sector.





***The higher GHG emissions savings estimated using the WARM methodology are primarily attributable to its inclusion of avoided emissions from the production of virgin materials replaced by recycled materials. In contrast, the Manfredi methodology accounts only for emissions avoided through the diversion of waste from landfills.**

OUR FOOTPRINT & WORK



12+

Locations across Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

200+

Warriors from across India solving the waste crisis in the IHR

10,000+

Metric tonnes of waste diverted from the environment to scientific processing since 2012

- **Empowering Communities**
- **Enhancing Infrastructure**
- **Strengthening Governance**
- **Promoting Local Entrepreneurship**
- **Overcoming Social Stigma**
- **Scaling Through Partnerships**

Our Models

Paryavaran Sakhi Model
Empowering local women to lead waste collection and processing while earning dignified livelihoods.

Local Entrepreneurship Model
Enabling community members to run decentralized waste systems and earn income through waste collection and processing.

YUWA Movement
Engaging youth to drive local climate actions and address civic issues through community-led movements.

Community Engagement
Engaging communities and tourists in local waste management and climate action through shared responsibility.

Hub and Spoke Model
Core offices serve as hubs, extending rapid expertise and support to nearby locations (spokes) for timely, community-linked interventions without permanent setups.

Protected Zones
A conservation-focused approach to waste management in ecologically sensitive areas, including national parks, sanctuaries, and wildlife reserves.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Q2 saw a shift from expanding waste services to strengthening the local ownership and institutional support needed to sustain them. Communities, elected representatives and local institutions across urban and rural areas took a more active role in managing waste systems, including contributing towards operational costs. Investments in infrastructure and processing capacity strengthened operations across Corbett, Kempty, Govind Wildlife Sanctuary, Shimla and other locations. Partnerships with local administrations also extended services to more remote communities. Progress in research, digital systems, organisational learning and community engagement further strengthened our ability to develop and scale context-specific solutions. The following highlights capture the evidence of this progress, illustrating the change and impact across our four levers of change.

Key Highlights

Financial Sustainability

- Local institutions are increasingly sharing the cost of waste management. **Six Dharamshala Rural Panchayats now cover 100% of collection and 25% of processing costs.** Over 35 commercial establishments contributed ₹35,000 in one month.
- In Sahastradhara, **onboarding all 16 units of Amulyam Society generated ₹8,000 in monthly user fees**, covering approximately 140% of operational costs. The project also secured ₹30,000 in monthly operational support from the Raipur Block Office.
- In Kempty, a **data-backed cost assessment** led to a 10% increase in the Zila Panchayat tender amount, while improved processing capacity contributed to **₹1.81 lakh in recyclable sales, the highest in the past 12 months.**

Operational Efficiency

- Stronger processing and recovery systems are increasing material diversion. **Dharamshala Urban Material Recovery Facility (MRF) dispatched 26.74 MT of plastic for further processing**, while Bir collected 24.69 MT of dry and wet waste through commercial collection.
- Infrastructure investments supported more localised waste processing, **including the commencement of Plastic Waste Management Unit (PWMU) construction in Govind Wildlife Sanctuary,** composting systems across three institutional campuses in Shimla, and additional storage and baling capacity at Kempty.
- Material recovery expanded through new waste streams and improved processing practices. **Harrawala diverted 322 kg of thermocol for recycling and sold 4 MT of compost.** Jeevangarh collected over one tonne of low-value plastic for organised processing.

Community Engagement & Governance

- One example of how active community participation translates into cleaner neighbourhoods is **Dharamshala Urban, where 155 new households were onboarded across 15 wards, contributing to a 95% reduction in littering at one identified hotspot**.
- Panchayats are strengthening local accountability and ownership. Raison and Duwara established Swachhata Samitis and waste management by-laws. **Duwara collected ₹44,000 in advance user fees, while Nagrota formalised by-laws across all 11 Panchayats.**
- Community engagement also expanded through youth, women and institutional participation. **Green Gurukul a part of ecolympics engaged 1,900+ students across 68 schools.** In Corbett our cross panchayat competition **“Swachhta Pratiyogita” reached over 500 people**, encouraging Panchayats to take a more active role in local waste management.

Enabling Systems for Scale

- A household segregation study in Dharamshala identified opportunities to improve collection and engagement, while route-monitoring trials recorded an increase **in observed segregation from around 65% to over 90%.**
- Partnerships and resource mobilisation are strengthening organisational resilience. **Protect Our Warriors This Monsoon raised ₹99,000, seven existing partners renewed their support, and new partners joined.**
- Through internal learning programmemes, **sector exchanges and BRIDGES for Conscious Travel,** we strengthened staff capabilities and brought greater visibility to Waste Warriors’ community-led initiatives.

OUR IMPACT

Environmental Impact

535 MT
waste diverted
in Q2 FY 2026-27

37.5 MT
carbon emissions reduced

14.7 MT
methane emissions reduced

1,365
trees saved

13.8
hectares of landfill saved

Social Impact

31,917
people engaged to adopt responsible waste management practices

9829
days of dignified livelihood

967
active citizens

18169
environment-positive climate actions

Governance Impact

₹10.95 lakh
in government funds (INR) unlocked for setting up solid waste management systems

6
material recovery facilities operational

24
waste banks operational

₹17.7 lakh
user fees collected (INR) from communities for enabling operations

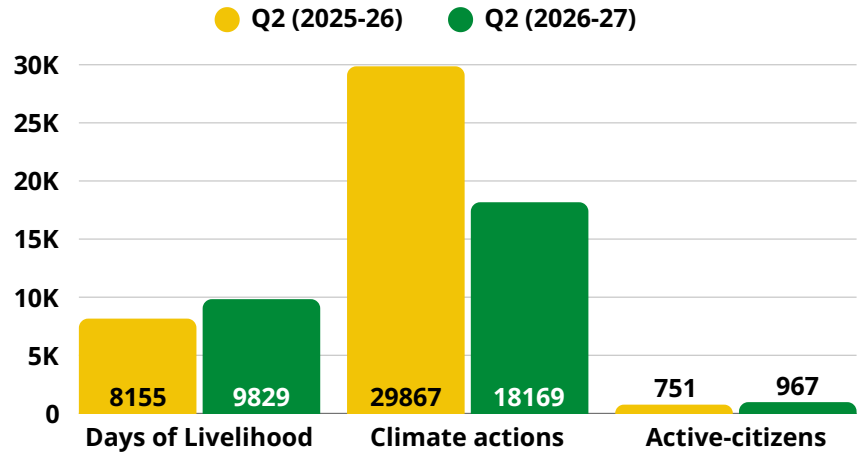


Members of the Mahila Mandal in Dharmashala Rural take part in a segregation awareness workshop to take forward the learnings to their circles of influence.

Quarter-on-Quarter Growth (Q2 FY25-26 vs Q2 FY26-27)

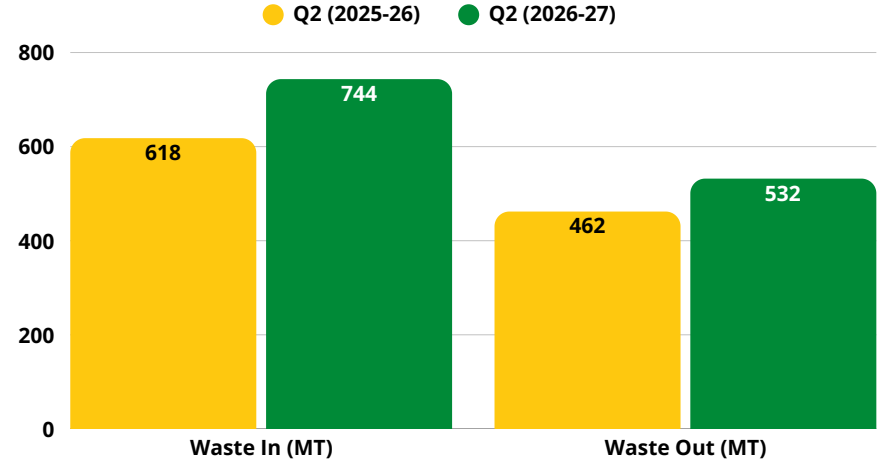
Growth in Livelihood Days, Climate Actions, and Active Citizens

Livelihood days increased by 17% as operations expanded into new geographies and created more local employment opportunities. While climate actions returned to regular programmeme levels as we changed criteria to address climate actions, active citizens grew by 22%, reflecting deeper community ownership and sustained participation in local waste management.



Growth in Waste Collection and Recycling Efficiency

Waste collection increased by 17% as new panchayats became operational and collection systems expanded. At the same time, waste sent to authorised recyclers grew by 13%, reflecting improved source segregation, stronger material recovery, and increased processing capacity across our operations.

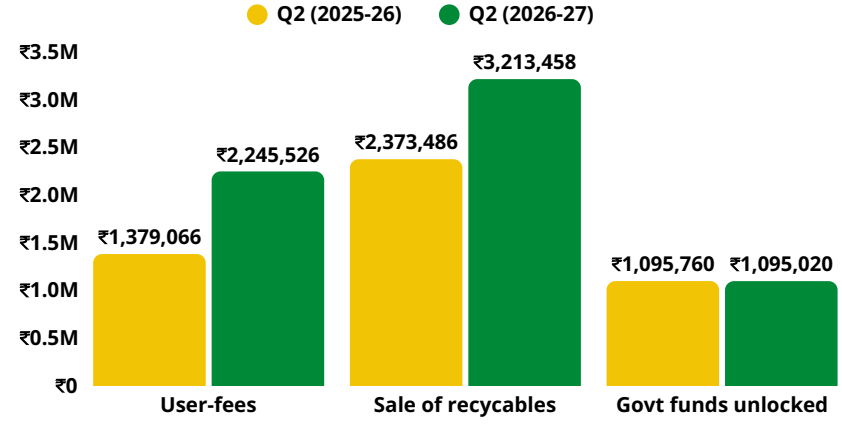


Revenue Trends and Fund Flow: Q2 Insights

Revenue from the sale of recyclables increased by 28%.

While government funding remained stable through stronger institutional partnerships and successful resource mobilisation.

User-fee collections rose 38% from Q2 last year due to targeted community campaigns and stakeholder support.



Ramnagar, Corbett Tiger Reserve

₹5.5 lakh for MRF upgrades • 4 Sakhi coordinators trained • Swachhta Pratiyogita launched

Corbett strengthened the foundations of its waste management model this quarter through improvements in MRF infrastructure, leadership development and community mobilisation. Following the team's advocacy, Zila Panchayat Nainital unlocked ₹5.5 lakh for two toilets and a 60-metre access road at the Ramnagar MRF, addressing essential workplace needs for 30 Paryavaran Sakhis. The project also completed an eight-session leadership programmeme for four Sakhi coordinators, helping them build skills in communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and shared responsibility. As an innovation, the team launched the Gram Panchayat Swachhta Pratiyogita 2026 - 27, engaging over 500 people within three weeks to encourage 10 Gram Panchayats to take greater ownership of waste management awareness and community participation.



The four Sakhi Coordinators pose with their mentor, Ashwin, and team members after the leadership session.



A newly constructed 60-metre access road at the MRF, improving access to the facility for Sakhis.



A new toilet facility at the MRF, addressing an essential need for the Paryavaran Sakhis.

The Gift of Swachhta: From a Son to His Mother

In the Bhawanipur area of Karanpur Panchayat, our Paryavaran Sakhis were out collecting waste as part of their daily routine when Mr. Rajeev Kumar, who was visiting his mother, heard the hooter of their collection vehicle. Curious, he stepped outside and asked, *"What is that sound? What work do you do, and how does this service work?"*

The conversation prompted our Sakhis to explain the entire process, including waste collection, segregation and the *Swachhta Nidhi*. As a result, he paid six months' worth of Swachhta Nidhi on behalf of his mother and requested: *"Hamare ghar par bhi bag laga dijiye. Aur meri Maa se kehna ki yeh service bilkul free hai."*

("Please install a bag at our home too. And tell my mother that this service is completely free.")



Sahastradhara, Dehradun

16 units onboarded in Seragaon • Government support secured • Expansion across 6 Panchayats

The SSD project strengthened financial sustainability and prepared for expansion across Raipur Block this quarter. In Seragaon Panchayat, onboarding all 16 units of Amulyam Society generated ₹8,000 in monthly user fees, contributing to approximately 140% OPEX coverage. The team also secured a partnership with the Raipur Block Office for a dedicated four-wheeler waste collection vehicle and ₹30,000 in monthly operational support. Building on previous baseline surveys, the team initiated stakeholder engagement and conducted Sakhi Samvad sessions across six new Panchayats, reaching 94 women and introducing them to the Paryavaran Sakhi model. These efforts have laid the foundation for locally owned, women-led waste management services across new communities.



Handover of the dedicated block vehicle to the Paryavaran Sakhis for waste collection.



Representatives from Raipur Block Panchayat, Kudiyal Gram Pradhan and Mahila Mangal Dal members during their visit to the PWMU.



Waste collection underway at Amulyam Society, Seragaon.



How Local Leadership Is Driving Change in Bhopalpani

Despite awareness campaigns and community outreach, participation in the Paryavaran Sakhi Model in Bhopalpani Panchayat remained limited. Recognising the need for stronger local leadership, Gram Pradhan Mr Raghuveer Singh stepped up to encourage community participation. From reaching residents through WhatsApp to engaging local shops and the Vyapar Mandal, he worked alongside the project team to bring the community on board. The Panchayat also distributed dustbins to shops using its own funds.

The change is beginning to show! Of the 110 units in one of Bhopalpani's two villages, 72 have joined the model. They regularly pay user fees and hand over segregated dry waste to the Paryavaran Sakhis. The Gram Pradhan is also engaging in discussions on operational costs, reflecting growing ownership of the initiative and a commitment to sustaining the effort to keep his Panchayat cleaner.

Kempty, Mussoorie

Tripartite MoU signed • 10% tender revision approved • PWMU infrastructure upgraded

Kempty strengthened the financial sustainability and operational efficiency of its waste management systems this quarter. In Banglow Ki Kandi, the first tripartite MoU between the Panchayat, Waste Warriors and the Local Entrepreneur established a Panchayat-funded billing system, with ₹38,194 billed for 338 units in August. Zila Panchayat Tehri also approved a 10% revision in the tender amount, increasing monthly support from ₹1,48,500 to ₹1,63,350 following a data-backed operational cost analysis. At the Plastic Waste Management Unit, a new baler, 350 sq. ft. of additional storage space and training for green workers improved material recovery and processing efficiency. These combined efforts contributed to a record recyclable sale of ₹1.81 lakh, the highest in the past 12 months, strengthening the project's revenue generation and long-term operational sustainability.

Govind Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarkashi

Survey completed across 884 units • Saur Panchayat adopts SWM by-laws

Construction of the Plastic Waste Management Unit in Mori Block began this quarter after sustained coordination with government departments. This marks an important step towards processing waste locally and reducing the need to transport it to Dehradun. The team also surveyed 884 household and commercial units across five Gram Panchayats and Naitwar Market to understand existing waste management practices and identify gaps. This will help guide future interventions. In Saur, the Gram Panchayat formed a Panchayat Samiti and adopted Solid Waste Management by-laws to strengthen local governance and community accountability. In Jakhol, the Panchayat and a local youth group began exploring funding options for a Waste Bank, encouraging local ownership from the start.
Together, these efforts are building the foundation for better infrastructure, informed planning and community-led waste management.



Signing of the tripartite MoU between Banglow Ki Kandi Gram Panchayat, Waste Warriors and the Local Entrepreneur.

Always a Warrior: The Story of Pasmeena Didi

Pasmeena Didi stepped away from Waste Warriors in 2024, but she was eager to return. So, when waste management operations began in Naitwar Market, she was delighted to be back. She stepped forward once again, taking responsibility for dry waste collection and segregation. The work is physically demanding. Serving as a central market to nearly 40 nearby villages and around 130 commercial establishments, Naitwar Market is no easy place to manage waste. Narrow pathways, difficult terrain, and limited transportation make the work even harder. Yet Pasmeena Didi keeps showing up. Every alternate day, she walks through the market, collecting waste and carrying loads of 50–60 kg on her back. She makes four to five trips across nearly 500 metres, determined to keep the market clean. Her story of returning to serve the mountains reflects the very spirit of our work. She may have stepped away, but the Warrior in her never left.

Once a Warrior, always a Warrior.



Kasauli

Community advocacy through ward members • D2D collection restored in 2 Panchayats

The past quarter saw communities step forward to advocate for continued access to waste management services. Following the Panchayat elections, changes in local representation led to temporary disruptions in door-to-door waste collection in Gulhari and Dharampur. Through continued community engagement, including door-to-door interactions and Chai Pe Charcha, residents of Dharampur mobilised support for the continuation of services. Four ward members submitted a community-backed letter to the Panchayat, urging the resumption of waste collection. Their collective voice helped reinstate the service. Similarly, collection services were restored in Ward 2 of Gulhari Panchayat after a six-month suspension. The community also showed enthusiastic suopport during Swachhta Pakhwara when three clean-up drives were organised at Kasauli Cantonment, engaging 40 participants, and recovering 205 kg of littered waste.

Shimla

2,943 people reached • Chamyana PWMU beautified • 244 kg waste recovered at Talai Fair

This quarter, 44 community engagement activities across 9 Panchayats reached 2,943 people, opening conversations around local waste management practices and challenges. These conversations are gradually translating into local action and ownership. In Chamyana, a once-neglected PWMU was revived as a functional waste processing facility, with a wall mural transforming it into a community attraction. The facility was formally inaugurated by Panchayat representatives, marking a step towards local ownership. In Kufri, a partnership with the 133 Infantry Eco Dogra Battalion led to the installation of a 50 kg/day in-vessel composter, bringing wet waste processing closer to the community. At the Talai Fair, the Mela Committee and local students joined hands in waste collection and clean-up efforts, helping recover 244 kg of dry waste. From conversations to infrastructure and collective action, these efforts reflect a growing community role in building local waste management solutions.

Manali

90% baseline and onboarding completed • ₹44,000 advance user fees collected

Commitment from local communities and stronger infrastructure are paving the way for sustainable waste management in Raison and Duwara Panchayats. This quarter, onboarding and a baseline survey for nearly 90% of the households and commercial units were completed. This has helped identify local practices and challenges, along with areas that require increased planning and engagement. In Duwara, an unused waste infrastructure being used as a dumpyard was cleared and converted into an operational Waste Bank for localised waste segregation. The representatives from both panchayats stepped forward and formed Swachhta Samitis and passed waste management by-laws. Demonstrating their commitment, Duwara Panchayat facilitated the advance collection of approximately ₹44,000 under Swachhta Nidhi for two months of operations. Together, these steps are building the institutional, financial and operational foundations for a more sustainable local waste management system.

From a Place People Avoided to a Place They Admire

During the beautification of our Plastic Waste Management Unit (PWMU), an elderly gentleman stopped by to admire the site.

“Kaisa lag raha hai, Uncle?” (How does it look, Uncle?) our team member asked.
“Bahut hi pyaara, beti! Bahut pyaara,” (Very beautiful, dear! Absolutely beautiful!) he replied.

After a tour of the PWMU, he shared that in his 15 years of living in the area, he had always hurried past this spot, covering his nose to avoid the foul smell and heaps of garbage. Today, he was witnessing a completely transformed space. From a place people once hurried past to one they now stop to admire, this is what change looks like.



Bir Billing

Commercials collection launched • 170 Commercials onboarded • 105 PRI representatives trained

Without a regular waste collection system for commercial establishments, waste was increasingly being littered across Bir, creating a major sanitation challenge in this popular tourist destination. With support from the local administration, a collection service was introduced in July 2026. A total of 170 commercial establishments enthusiastically enrolled, with each receiving three collections per week. By September, 24.69 MT of dry and wet waste had been collected and transported for further processing. Alongside improving waste services, efforts were made to strengthen local governance and promote responsible tourism. In September, 105 PRI and Panchayat Samiti representatives attended two capacity-building sessions on sustainable waste management, funding mechanisms and developing local by-laws. To help tourists make informed choices, a 3D tourist information board, Parikrama, was installed near the Keori Landing Site. It provides information on local attractions, essential services and waste management facilities.

Dharamshala Rural

Panchayats commit to system costs • 35+ commercials onboarded • ₹35,000 revenue generated

Representatives from six Panchayats visited the Swachhata Kendra in Rakkar to learn about its operations and finances. Taking this learning back to their villages, they encouraged commercial establishments to join the waste collection service and contribute through user fees. As a result, over 35 establishments enrolled, generating a combined revenue of ₹35,000 across the six Panchayats.

The Panchayats also took a step towards greater financial ownership by revising their existing MoUs. They agreed to cover 100% of waste collection costs and 25% of processing costs. They also committed to contributing towards the cost of managing waste from bulk waste generators (commercial establishments with 5+ rooms). From understanding the costs to sharing the responsibility, these steps mark progress towards a more financially sustainable, locally owned waste management system.



3D tourist information board Parikrama, launched near the Keori Landing Site.

From Frustration to Friendship and Participation

When Pushpa first encountered the waste management system, she was unhappy and reluctant to participate. Building her trust and encouraging her to engage with the system was not easy. Manveer Kaur, an active citizen in her community, continued reaching out to Pushpa. Through regular conversations, friendship and persistence, she listened to Pushpa's concerns and gradually built a connection with her. Over time, Pushpa's perspective began to change. From resisting the system, she moved to regularly handing over her waste and paying the user fee. Pushpa's journey reminds us that change does not always happen overnight. Sometimes, it takes patience, trust and someone willing to keep showing up. **A little friendship beyond the bin can go a long way in building a cleaner, greener village.**



Dharamshala Urban MRF

100+ MRF visitors • Green Worker morale and team bonding • 26.74 MT dispatched for processing

Making waste management visible to the community is essential to building acceptance of scientific waste-processing practices and recognition of the people behind the system. During the quarter, 100+ people visited the Urban MRF, strengthening its position as a learning and demonstration centre. Green Workers also came together with their families for an informal interaction, creating space to understand their concerns and boost their morale. Alongside this, partnerships with IPCA Samba and Ambuja Cements were strengthened to facilitate the downstream processing of segregated materials. This enabled the dispatch of 18.99 MT of multilayer plastic to IPCA Samba and 7.75 MT of low-value plastic to Ambuja Cements for co-processing.

Dehradun Model Ward programme and MRF

Community awareness strengthened • Thermocol recycling initiated • 4 tonnes of compost sold

The Dehradun Model Ward programmeme continued to strengthen community participation and responsible waste management this quarter. In Geeta Puram, 75 dustbins were distributed to active citizens, encouraging source segregation and the separate collection of food waste for cattle. At Ward 97, Harrawala, a community-led cleanliness drive brought together residents, students, public representatives and partner organisations to promote collective responsibility for cleaner surroundings. The team also conducted a Menstrual Hygiene Management workshop in Rani Pokhri, engaging students on menstrual health, personal care and responsible waste disposal. At the Harrawala Material Recovery Facility (MRF), 322 kg of thermocol was diverted for recycling, while new processes were introduced to recover refuse-derived fuel from inert waste. The team also sold 4 tonnes of compost, improving material recovery and reducing storage pressure at the facility.



Active citizens with their dustbins, encouraging responsible waste segregation and collection in Geeta Puram.



Curiosity That Bloomed into Years of Change

When Savita Naudiyal ji moved to Harrawala in 2018, regular waste collection and segregation were still new to the area. Through Waste Warriors' awareness efforts, she gradually made waste segregation a part of her daily routine. A keen gardener, Savita ji soon took another step towards responsible waste management: home composting. Over the past four years, she has managed around 547 kg of wet waste at home, turning kitchen scraps into nutrient-rich compost for her plants. And the results are blooming in her garden! Earlier, her plants often dried up after a season, and she had to replace them. With homemade compost, they began thriving for longer, with many continuing to grow for years. **Sometimes, change begins in our own kitchens and blooms right in our gardens.**

Renuka Wetlands

Youth engagement strengthened • Renuka Fair volunteering renewed • Wetland conservation

Youth engagement for wetland conservation strengthened this quarter through the continued partnership between us and Govt. Degree College, Dadahu. As part of their collaboration, 32 youth volunteers from Renuka visited the MRF in Dehradun to learn about waste processing and responsible waste management. Having supported waste management during Renuka Fair, household onboarding and community engagement over the past three years, the students renewed their commitment to volunteer at the upcoming fair. This engagement strengthens volunteer mobilisation and local youth participation in protecting the Renuka Wetland, a Ramsar site.

Asan Barrage

1,079 kg low-value plastic collected • 700+ kg sent for processing • Waste recovery strengthened

The project introduced an organised system to recover low-value plastic in Jeevangarh Panchayat, reducing dumping around the Asan Wetland. By engaging Safai Saathis in collecting and storing low-value plastic alongside high-value plastic, the initiative strengthened local recovery practices. During the quarter, 1,079.55 kg of low-value plastic was collected, with over 700 kg transported to the Harrawala MRF in Dehradun for processing, marking the first organised diversion of this waste from Jeevangarh Panchayat.

WISH, Shimla

3 campuses equipped • Composters installed • Decentralised waste management strengthened

Waste management infrastructure was established across three institutional campuses in Shimla under the WISH project, with composting systems installed at the State Fire Training Centre, Baldeyan, and Combined Training Institute, Sargheen, and an in-vessel composter and supporting infrastructure set up at Model Central Jail, Kanda. These systems lay the foundation for decentralised wet-waste management and on-site composting, reducing reliance on external disposal. Their impact will be measured through the quantity of wet waste processed, compost produced and waste diverted.

Tetra Pak Dehradun

16.65 MT of UBC collected • ₹65,040 in income generated • 163 livelihood days created

This quarter, the project combined recyclable packaging recovery with community outreach to strengthen the Used Beverage Cartons (UBC) recycling network across Uttarakhand. Engagement with Safai Saathis, scrap dealers and aggregators led to the collection of 16,652 kg of UBC, generating ₹65,040 in income and 163 livelihood days for Safai Saathis. In Dehradun, a community cleanup and awareness drive diverted over 500 kg of waste to the Harrawala MRF. The UBC Lao, Ration Pao initiative also recognised Safai Saathis' contributions and encouraged continued participation in UBC collection.

Building Better Waste Habits at School

At Government Girls' Upper Primary School, Jeewangarh, dry waste was once burnt or discarded outside the school premises. Since April 2026, the school has started segregating its waste for collection and transportation to the Asan Waste Bank.

But the bigger change goes beyond waste collection. Students are learning to use notebook pages carefully, avoid littering and understand that paper still has value even after its first use.
Because sometimes, change begins not with where we put our waste, but with how we learn to see it.



YUWA

1,900+ students engaged • 6,451 climate actions • 169 Plastic Free July actions taken

Small everyday actions can lead to bigger changes. Through the month-long Plastic Free July campaign, YUWA encouraged young people in Dehradun and Dharamshala to reduce single-use plastic through simple weekly challenges, such as carrying reusable bags and bottles, avoiding plastic packaging and organising clean-up drives. Multiple WhatsApp groups helped participants share their actions and encourage one another throughout the campaign. Together, 46 changemakers took 169 climate actions and engaged with 331 people.

"At our diagnostic centre, we replaced single-use plastic bottles with refillable hand wash and sanitiser dispensers. These simple changes in our daily practices can help reduce overall plastic waste.

- Kavita Kumari, Campaign Participant

Through Green Gurukul 2026, students explored environmental issues around them and took practical steps to address them in their schools and communities. The initiative brought together 1,900+ students from 68 schools across Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, who undertook over 480 activities and an estimated 6,451 climate actions. In Uttarakhand, participation grew by 48.4% to reach 1,461 students across 52 schools. In Himachal Pradesh, the programmeme expanded from 5 to 16 schools, engaging 450+ students. It also included 30+ children from Bajaj Institute of Learning for the Deaf, creating opportunities for more students to participate in climate action.



Students from Army public school Dharamshala participating in Green Gurukul - Wall of change



When Learning Becomes Action

Vanshika and Priyanshu's journeys with YUWA began at different times, through Ecolympics 2026 and Ecolympics 2024. What started as participation gradually grew into a personal commitment to sustainability. Taking their learning beyond themselves, they conducted environmental awareness sessions at Government School Bagli and Government School Ladhwara, reaching 48 and 62 students respectively.

Together, they engaged 110 students in conversations about environmental responsibility and sustainable practices, turning their own learning into an opportunity for others to learn and take action. **From participants to peer educators, Vanshika and Priyanshu are showing how young people can inspire change in others.**

Dharamshala Urban

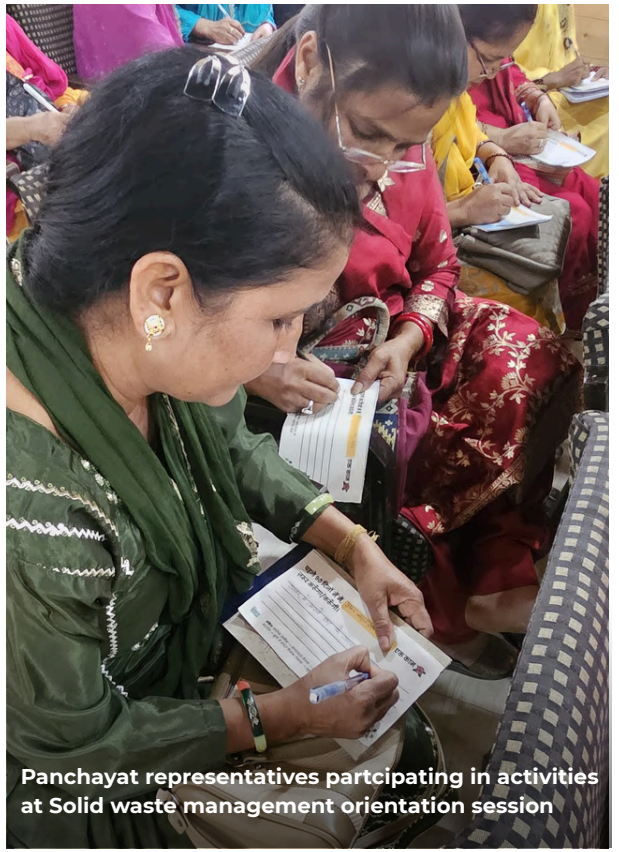
1,887 people engaged • 155 households onboarded • 95% reduction in littering at one hotspot

Positive change across Dharamshala is being driven by active citizens who are encouraging others to take part in keeping their neighbourhoods clean. With their support, we engaged 1,887 people across 15 wards through clean-up drives, mohalla meetings, workshops, MRF visits and door-to-door outreach. These efforts are translating into greater household participation in waste collection. In Police Colony, the number of participating households increased from 35 to 140, while all 15 households in BSNL Colony joined the collection system and formed a group to raise local sanitation concerns. Residents and Ward Councillors from Wards 4, 11 and 13 also came together to clear and beautify three littering hotspots through plantation drives. At one of these hotspots, daily littering reduced from 70 to 80 bags to just 2–3. From better household participation to cleaner public spaces, active citizen leadership is helping turn collective action into lasting change across Dharamshala.

Nagrota

11.4 Metric tonnes processed • By-laws in 11 Panchayats • Community capacity strengthened

Keerchamba, Ghorab and Chhari Panchayats in Nagrota are leading the shift away from waste burning and open dumping towards source segregation and organised waste collection, with 11.4 metric tonnes of waste handed over to Safai Saathis for further processing. Communities and their representatives across all 11 Panchayats are stepping up to support this change. Through solid waste management orientations, community workshops and capacity-building sessions, they have strengthened their understanding of sustainable waste management practices and their respective roles. This growing participation is backed by waste management by-laws formalised across all 11 Panchayats, establishing clearer responsibilities and accountability for managing the system.



Panchayat representatives partcipating in activities at Solid waste management orientation session

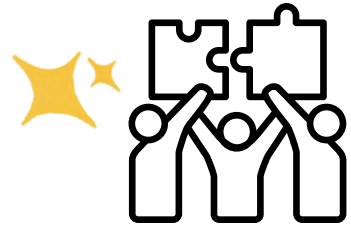
Tharu Panchayat: The Youngest Champions of Cleanliness

A pile of waste near a temple and a small pond had villagers in Tharu Panchayat worried about their children's health. The situation called for action, not just concern. That's when active citizen Ajay Kumar ji reached out to Waste Warriors. Together, they brought villagers together for a clean-up drive. Among the volunteers were four to five young children who joined in enthusiastically. Before leaving, they told one of our Warriors, "Aap kal phir se aana, hum har jagah safai karenge!" ("Please come again tomorrow. We will clean everywhere!") And they meant it. Even today, whenever we visit the Panchayat for an activity, these children are among the first to show up. What began as a clean-up drive became an opportunity for these young minds to learn that caring for their surroundings is everyone's responsibility.



PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

ENABLING SYSTEMS FOR SCALE



Research & Evidence: Strengthening systems through learning

- This quarter, the Research team developed a standardised compost sampling, testing and quality assurance protocol, drawing on field learnings from Harrawala and Sahastradhara in Dehradun. Ready for testing across decentralised composting technologies, it will support consistent quality assessments and evidence-based decisions.
- A household waste segregation study in Dharamshala, covering 125 households and key stakeholders including municipal officials, supervisors and Safai Saathis, identified opportunities to address waste hotspots and improve operational efficiency. **Monitoring trials also showed that continuous monitoring of collection routes increased observed segregation rates from around 65% to over 90%.**
- The team submitted a scientific paper on user-fee payment behaviour to Waste Management & Research, which has progressed to editorial review.
- In Sahastradhara, a more interactive community engagement approach using the Safai Kaptaan mascot, street plays and signboards was introduced to address engagement fatigue and encourage household onboarding and user-fee payments.

Digital Transformation: Streamlining systems and strengthening impact

- Material flow reporting was centralised on SATYA, while the Saksham learning and development process was digitised on SAATHI 2.0, including live post-training feedback.
- Integrations with BigQuery, Google Drive and WATI improved connectivity across Zoho applications. Increased in-house technical capacity also reduced reliance on external vendors.
- An AI-driven data privacy assessment across project teams and enabling functions identified security risks and recommendations to strengthen organisational compliance.

Learning & Development: Building a culture of continuous learning

- Over 50 Warriors participated in the Spoken English programmeme, completing nine weeks of learning. Activities such as “Word of the Week”, Gratitude Wall and newspaper reading provided regular opportunities to practise spoken English and build confidence.
- The Menstrual Health and Hygiene Committee continued to build internal awareness of sustainable menstruation, exploring alternatives to disposable products and strengthening knowledge that can inform community engagement.
- Beyond internal learning, over 20 Warriors joined the LeAP leadership journey, creating opportunities for reflection, leadership development and peer learning.
- Participation in The CHARCHA 2026, India's largest collaborative social sector convening, connected Warriors with civil society organisations, government representatives and donors, while opening discussions on emerging themes such as AI and the future of the social sector.
- On 17 September, Waste Warriors participated in RARE India's BRIDGES for Conscious Travel 2026, a gathering of organisations working towards sustainable and responsible tourism.
- The team showcased its Volunteer Tourism and Trek It Back initiatives, highlighting opportunities to integrate responsible waste management into tourism.
- Upcycled products made by the Weaving Lives Self-Help Group were also exhibited, showcasing local livelihoods and creative reuse.

Caring for Those Who Care for Our Communities

On 5 September, we took a small but meaningful step towards recognising the health and well-being of the women who make our work possible on the ground: our Paryavaran Sakhis in Corbett. Regular physical work can take a toll on the body. With this in mind, we introduced guided stretching sessions to help the Sakhis reduce muscle stiffness, improve flexibility and support their physical well-being. The first session received an encouraging response, with the Sakhis participating enthusiastically and following the exercises with interest. What began as a simple initiative is a step towards making their health and well-being a more integral part of how we work.



Partnerships & Preparedness: Building resilience for scale

- The Protect Our Warriors This Monsoon campaign raised ₹99,000 to equip 100 Warriors with raincoats and ponchos, helping safeguard them against the battering mountain rains.
- Kores and Ghanta Family Foundation came on board to support SWM in Asan and YUWA DHM, while seven existing partners renewed their support.
- Corporate engagement expanded through Cisco's employee volunteering programmeme, which brought together over 100 employees. A month-long sustainability competition was launched to extend participation beyond the volunteering day.
- Waste Warriors undertook field visits to the ecosystem partners: Zero Waste Ladakh and Navikru Foundation in Leh, Bharat Ingenuity Foundation in Umrongso, Assam, and Him Village EPrahari in Haridwar. The visits involved interactions with communities, field teams and local government representatives, alongside observations of waste collection, processing and storage systems. These exchanges provided valuable insights into each partner's approaches, operational practices and local waste management challenges, creating opportunities for shared learning and collaboration.



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At The CHARCHA 2026, India's largest collaborative social sector convening, Warriors engaged with civil society organisations, government representatives and donors, exchanging perspectives on emerging themes, including AI and the future of the social sector.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

GLOBAL RECOGNITION FOR COMMUNICATION AND IMPACT

For the second consecutive year, Waste Warriors received two global recognitions at the ISWA World Congress:



ISWA Video Award (1st):
Burning Mountains, highlighting the impact of unmanaged waste on Himalayan ecosystems. Watch the award-winning film here.





ISWA Communication Award (3rd):
The Largest Mountain Cleanup 2025, recognising an initiative that mobilised 8,492 volunteers across 101 sites and collected 18,598 kg of waste across the Indian Himalayan Region.



Research Feature – NextBillion

Making Waste Pay: The Keys to Sustaining Paying Customers in Solid Waste Management
A study of 850 households across six villages near Dharamshala, exploring the factors that influence user-fee payments and customer retention. The article highlights how reliable services, community participation and visible cleanliness outcomes can help make waste management systems financially sustainable.
Read the article on NextBillion

Looking Ahead: Scaling Proven Models Across the Indian Himalayan Region

Waste Warriors is seeking long-term institutional partners to strengthen community-led waste management systems in four Himalayan locations. Each project has established a strong foundation through local government partnerships and community participation. The next phase focuses on building the infrastructure, local capacity and financial sustainability needed to secure lasting impact.

We Are Looking for Long Term Partners in These Locations:



Manali, Himachal Pradesh: Since 2023, Waste Warriors has onboarded 270+ households, collected and processed 4.3 MT of waste, and established a community Waste Bank through its pilot programmeme.

Next phase: Expand the model to surrounding Panchayats, prioritising locations with strong local government partnerships and community ownership.



Kempty, Uttarakhand: Since 2021, Waste Warriors has responsibly managed 478 MT of waste, onboarded 609 households and engaged over 4.35 lakh citizens, tourists and stakeholders. Strong Zila Panchayat support has established a proven model of government-backed, community-led waste management.
Next phase: Strengthen waste processing infrastructure, particularly for wet waste management.



Dharamshala Rural, Himachal Pradesh: Since 2021, Waste Warriors has established community-led waste management systems across six Panchayats, combining decentralised dry waste collection, Local Entrepreneur-led operations and community ownership. The model has gained state recognition, with one Panchayat receiving the Himachal Pradesh State Environment Leadership Award in 2026. It also serves as a learning hub for government officials and practitioners from across the country.

Next phase: Strengthen financial sustainability, introduce wet waste management across all six Panchayats and establish a permanent MRF.



CARE TO KEEP THE MOUNTAINS CLEAN WITH US?

Partner with us to build resilient, community-owned waste management systems across the Indian Himalayan Region. To explore institutional partnerships, CSR collaborations, or philanthropic support, write to us at partnerships@wastewarriors.org.

We are grateful to all our donors and individual funders for supporting our mission and envisioning a cleaner Himalaya together.

















































Alliances and Consortiums

Blessed to be a part of this community. Together, we are able to achieve much more than we ever could on our own.



























Government Collaborations

Thankful to all our government stakeholders for their guidance, support and commitment!

































WASTE WARRIORS

REDUCE RE-USE RECYCLE

Waste Warriors believes waste is a global problem requiring local action. Since our founding over 13 years ago, we've accelerated our mission from one location to 13 project locations across the Indian Himalayan Region. In the states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, we are building inclusive, participatory and sustainable approaches to solving the waste crisis. We are fully committed to serving our community tirelessly, both in their daily lives and during moments of crisis. Through these efforts, we are reshaping perspectives and shaping a collective future - a future of meaningful change.

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